Improving the Text of The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake

David V. Erdman

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William Muir
Raymond Lister

Robert Essick's review of the Manchester Etching Workshop's Blake facsimile, in which he says that "little is known about Muir and why he labored so long and hard on Blake facsimiles," reminds me that in 1961, when I was running the Golden Head Press at Cambridge, and was experimenting, among other things, with hand-colored books, I planned to write and publish a small book on Muir. Unfortunately I was, owing to other commitments, unable to do this, but the plan did produce some comments in a letter from the late Kerrison Preston which, in view of the small amount known about Muir, ought to be placed on record.

The Georgian House
Rockshaw Road
Merstham, Surrey
22 August, 1961

Dear Mr. Lister,

Many thanks for your letter to-day. I congratulate you on getting Muir's "Visions," which is well worth having. If it is the same as Lot 467 at Sotheby's on the 1st August, I think Quaritch paid £16 for it, so they are not making an unfair profit. The Lot included a loosely inserted letter from Muir to the Editor of The Academy, which would be interesting. I had many letters myself from Muir, some of which I still have.

When I knew him he was a little, wizened old man, undecorated (like Blake) and very quiet and calm in spite of his great enthusiasm. He lived with his little old wife in East London and I think he had a Chemist's shop there. I happened to mention this to Geoffrey the other day but he did not seem to know of any shop.

I never went to Muir's house or shop, but he used to come to see me at Bournemouth. He talked incessantly about Blake who was his great hero but in spite of this he always struck me as having more of a scientific than artistic cast of mind. He made these remarkable facsimiles with the aid of his wife and other helpers, using any mechanical means available as well as his artistic skill.

I knew nothing of Chemistry or the scientific side in which he was so interested, but he often used to go on from Bournemouth to Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset where he had a great scheme for extracting oil from shale, which he thought might become enormously valuable and lucrative. But he was by no means a money-grubber and his ideas were mostly unworlidy, like Blake's. He lived in a very modest way and was utterly unpretentious.

There—that is about all I know about Muir. I have very friendly and admiring recollections of him, but I am afraid they do not amount to enough to help you with constructing a Biography. I should be greatly interested to help you. Whatever contributions there might be from other people to a composite portrait of him. He has been a number of Blake friends through his Agent, Quaritch, and others, but his facsimiles were, of course, laborious and therefore limited in number. Their artistic success, especially in colour, depends largely on which of the Blake originals he happened to get hold of. He would not have a wide choice in that. I think the "America" is the best, with its brilliant colouring.

I hope you will have a go at making at least a sketch of his life. It might, as you say, make a "pretty little booklet," if not more.

I will remember (probably) not to pester you in September. I hope you will have the thoroughly good holiday you deserve, despite the Welsh language.

Kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

Kerrison Preston

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1 Apparently my copy of the Visions of the Daughters of Albion was not this same lot; there was no letter in it from Muir when I acquired it.

2 I do not know the present whereabouts of these, but it is probable that they are in the Westminster Public Library with Preston's Blake collection.

3 Sir Geoffrey Keynes.

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Despite the extended cooperative effort of several Blake scholars to make it a faithful and accurate as well as complete edition, the Doubleday and California text of 1982 retained a sprinkling of misprints and even a few mistranscriptions. By the summer of 1983, Blake 17 (1983), 14, could report about a score of mostly simple errata and note the problems of some of Blake's Hebrew lettering.

By the autumn of 1984 a sizable list of errata was sent to Doubleday and to California. And now that the Doubleday (paperback) is in a second printing, it is comforting to find that proper corrections have been made of that first score and another two score errata. When the California hardback goes into its next printing, we can expect these to be attended to there.

It is a curious thing, however, that one mistake, which the California printers corrected before their first printing, has been left alone by the Doubleday printers. Illustration 2, The Laocoon, facing page 272, as first printed gives a negative instead of a positive impression: the text reads white on black instead of black on white as Blake wanted it. Let's hope that the third Anchor printing will get the joke.

In the list that follows, it seems best to include the earlier as well as the later errors discovered—so that possessors of the first printing (hard or soft) will not
need to buy a new edition to make the noted improvements. Corrections already made, in the Doubleday second printing, will be marked with asterisks. Most of the mistakes were in text; some were in headings and apparatus.

ERRATA EMENDATA

p. xvi  Line 28: Centerbury should read canterbury
*p.xx  Preceding "TEXTUAL NOTES . . . ERD-MAN": insert RECENT CONJECTURAL ATTRIBUTIONS 785
*p. 3  Top: reverse the paragraphs headed "Conclusion" and "Application." As John Grant points out, it would be a further nicety if the closing "line" were to be printed thus:

Therefore
God becomes as we are,  
that we may be as he is

p. 71  Margin: [line number] 50 should read 40
Line 26: abominable should read abominable [the one erratum spotted by the Santa Cruz collective]

p. 85  Running head: THE BOOK OF URIZEN should read THE BOOK OF AHANIA

*p. 103  Lines 42–44 have broken letters
*p. 121  Line 63: flutes should read flutes[ ]
*p. 131  Margin, bottom: The Hebrew letter at the top of Blake’s marginal note is Kaph but should be Khaph.

p. 145  After line 3 of paragraph 2: insert ' in the margin
*p. 148  Line 60: Jersaulam should read Jerusalem
*p. 167  Line 25: Jerusalem should read Jerusalem
*p. 271  Running head: ADEL should read ABEL
*p. 273  [Jah, for Jehovah] should read [Jehovah] [The Hebrew letters are Heh and Yod, not Jah.]
*p. 371  Beside "End of The Seventh Night": delete '  
*p. 387  Line 11: Roaming should read Roaring
*p. 390  Line 15: asterial should read [asterial]
*p. 390  Line 40: self destroying should read self-destroying
*  Line 45: deceit should read deceit
*  Line 24: self cursed should read self-cursed
*p. 391  Line 40: guard should read Guard
*  Line 3: awake from deaths should read awake to life from deaths
*  Line 21: said should read Said
*p. 392  Line 34: autumn should read Autumn
*  Line 1: slaves should read Slaves
*  Line 19: While should read while
*p. 393  Line 31: your should read Your
*p. 395  Line 39: thro the Mercy should read thro Mercy
*  Line 12: oblivion should read Oblivion

Line 19: branching should read branchy
*p. 397  Line 11: o my flocks should read O my flocks
*p. 399  Line 14 (of p. 131): Tharmas, O should read Tharmas O
*p. 400  Line 35: depart the clouds should read depart. the clouds
*p. 401  Line 32: What should read what
*p. 402  Line 38: dead should read Dead
*p. 402  Line 32: inconceivable should read inconceivable
*p. 404  Line 16: sons & daughters should read Sons & Daughters
*p. 405  Line 10: by sons should read by the sons

p. 482  The Pickering Manuscript (Morgan Library): In my textual note on “Auguries of Innocence” (p. 860), I indicated that the Pickering ms was hastily written; one more look at the ms makes me realize that it is not only the mending of letters that causes trouble, but the difficulty of making sure whether a capital or lower case was intended. Most of these make little significant difference, but I’d now like to report the following somewhat—i.e., more or less—conjectural readings of letters.

Line 5: disdain should read Dishain
*p. 483  Line 21: day should read Day
*p. 484  Line 8: sow should read Sow
*p. 485  Line 28: seventy should read Seventy
*p. 485  Line 52: Beggar should read Begger
*p. 485  Line 57: allay should read Allay

*p. 486  Line 15: waters should read Waters
*p. 487  Line 25: dove should read Dove
*p. 487  Line 32: Envoy be free was mended from Envy is free

p. 489  ["Auguries of Innocence"] ["The Crystal Cabinet"] Line 27: air should read Air
*p. 490  Line 6: dove should read Dove
doves should read Doves
*p. 491  Line 23: strike should read Strife
*p. 491  Line 52: on was mended from in
*p. 491  Line 53: truth should read Truth
*p. 491  Line 74: death should read Death
*p. 492  Line 99: deform should read Deform
*p. 492  Line 109: doubt should read Doubt
*p. 492  Line 111: do should read Do

p. 496  Title: John Brown & Mary Bell became expanded to Long John Brown & Pretty Mary Bell, and then Pretty was changed to Little
Line 1: Pretty became Little
Line 2: Young John became Long John
Line 8 (from bottom): delete colon following Hebrew [Blake’s phrase means “my Hebrew alphabet,” but he gives the actual aleph-beth-gimel. N.b.: The Hebrew letters are correct, and in the correct order.]

p. 727

Line 12 (from bottom): [30 . . . line] should read 30 ninefold inserted above the line

p. 863

Near top: PAGE 136 should read 135 and PAGE 135 should read 136

p. 845

Near margin, bottom, above “Night the Ninth”. insert PAGE 117

p. 843

Left margin, bottom: [First line under PAGE 118] should read 15 asterial 2nd rdg del] eternal 1st rdg del]

p. 842

After Line 12: insert XXI [Below “In burnt offerings for Sin thou hast had no Pleasure” Blake first wrote [Praise to God is the Exercise of Imaginative Art.”]

p. 689

Near bottom: move “On design No 38 . . . Venus’ down the page to follow “On verso of No 36 . . . ?window”

p. 688

After Line 12: insert XXI [Below “In burnt offerings for Sin thou hast had no Pleasure” Blake first wrote [Praise to God is the Exercise of Imaginative Art.”]

p. 689

Line 9: after It is Spiritually Discerned] insert the deleted words: [Prayer to God is the Study of Imaginative Art]

p. 687

Line 9: Incriptions should read Inscriptions

p. 687

Line 6: Incriptions should read Inscriptions

p. 727

Line 8 (from bottom): delete colon following Hebrew [Blake’s phrase means “my Hebrew alphabet,” but he gives the actual aleph-beth-gimel. N.b.: The Hebrew letters are correct, and in the correct order.]

p. 727

After “The Washer Womans Song”: insert this new poem (including signature at bottom):

THE PHOENIX TO MRS BUTTS
I saw a Bird rise from the East
As a Bird rises from its Nest
With sweetest Songs I ever heard
It sang I am Mrs Butts Bird
And then I saw a Fairy gay
That with this beauteous Bird would play
From a golden cloud she came
She call’d the sweet Bird by its name
She call’d it Phoenix! Heavens Dove!
She call’d it all the names of Love
But the Bird flew fast away
Where little Children sport & play
And they stook’d it with their hands
All their cove’ts it understands
The Fairy to my bosom flew
Weeping tears of morning dew
I said: Thou foolish whimpering thing
Is not that thy Fairy Ring
Where those Children sport & play
In Fairy fancies light & gay
Seem a Child & be a Child
And the Phoenix is beguild
But if thou seem’st a Fairy thing
Then it flies on glancing wing

WILLIAM BLAKE

p. 563

Line 15 (from bottom): Visions also should read Vision is also

p. 687

Line 6: Inscriptions should read Inscriptions

p. 687

Line 9: after It is Spiritually Discerned] insert the deleted words: [Prayer to God is the Study of Imaginative Art]

p. 727

After line 7 (from bottom): insert Maries at the Sepulcher. 4 The Death of Joseph. 5 The Death of the Virgin

p. 765

Two sentences of the letter are repeated: delete lines 8–10 and the first word of line 11.

p. 785

Under “Recent Conjectural Attributions”: delete last three lines; insert A more evidently genuine “piece of Blakean doggerel written in pale blue water colour with a brush” and discovered by Geoffrey Keynes is “The Phoenix to Mrs Butts,” a manuscript now in the family of a great grandson of Mrs. Butts and signed by an authenticated Blake signature. We include it above (p 517).

p. 789

After “imperfection.” (bottom): insert That the “Conclusion” belongs before the “Application” has been pointed out by John Grant. (One cannot apply a conclusion until it has been reached.)

p. 791

[“The Blossom” note] should read 6 my falsely reported as “thy” in posthumous copies, but see M.E. Reiner in Blake Newsletter 40: 130.

[“The Chimney Sweeper” note]: insert 20 He’d But inked tracing in copy AA (destroying the sense).

p. 808

Note on Hebrew for Milton 32: 15: This entry makes no sense, since the “wrong” reading has been silently corrected by the printer to the “right” reading. Blake wrote a Kaph (ג) where he should have written a Khaph (ד). So we must change the first Hebrew word in this line, having it begin (at the right end) with a Kaph (ג). Leslie Brisman, however, argues that Blake may have intended an etymological pun; so the letters as Blake place them may be allowed to stand (with the Kaph at the beginning but above the line).

p. 814

After 1:19: insert 1:28 serpents ] serpents [?all] 1st rdg

p. 843

Left margin, bottom, above “Night the Ninth”. insert PAGE 117

p. 845

Near top: PAGE 136 should read 135 and PAGE 135 should read 136

p. 863

Line 12 (from bottom): [30 . . . line] should read 30 ninefold inserted above the line

p. 727

Line 8 (from bottom): delete colon following Hebrew [Blake’s phrase means “my Hebrew alphabet,” but he gives the actual aleph-beth-gimel. N.b.: The Hebrew letters are correct, and in the correct order.]
reading “Rich” has been corrected by G. E.
Bentley, Jr.

p. 874 Top: below “The Washer Woman’s Song” insert
The Phoenix to Mrs Butts, first published
in TLS, September 14, 1984, pp 1021–
22.


p. 891 Under [Inscriptions in . . . Job, 1825] add a
new paragraph after Insignificant variants
. . . pp 55–66.: The canceled sentences on
plates 1 and XXI were first discovered by
Robert N. Essick, as reported in Blake 19
(1985–86) 96–102, on early versions of
Blake’s plates. These recovered declara-
tions somewhat conflict with modern crit-
ical interpretation which assumes a sharp
contrast between Job’s beginning and his
latter end. Before and after Job’s trials, he
and his family were concentrating on the
Right Thing.

p. 974 Line 10: 494, ’782 should read 503, ’864
*p. 981 Line 5: 6850 should read ’850
*p. 982 After line 13 (from bottom): insert Night-
ingale, To the 785
p. 983 After line 7 (from bottom): insert The Phoenix
to Mrs Butts 517

*p. 983 Bottom line: ’864 should read ’846
*p. 985 Line 20: 622 should read 662
* Line 30: birth should read birth
*p. 986 Line 7: Cert should read Art
After line 14 (from bottom): insert “The
Use of Money & its Wars” 687

p. 987 After line 16: insert “Till thou dost injure
. . .” ’835
*p. 988 After line 7: insert “To the Nightingale” 785

Has anyone found other errata? If so, please let me know,
to make corrections in the next printings.

—DISCUSSION—

A Reply to Martin Butlin

Raymond Lister

I refer to the note by Martin Butlin printed in the Spring
1986 issue of Blake An Illustrated Quarterly. I regret if
in my review I unintentionally misrepresented what Mr.
Butlin said about the Keating forgeries; I of course ac-
cept his version. But so far as I know he did not at the
time nor at any subsequent time publicly deny the Times
report (his alleged comments were printed in The Times
on 16 July 1976; Keating’s admission appeared there
on 20 August 1976).

As a principal prosecution witness at the Keating trial I saw most of the newspaper and other reports, but
I do not recall seeing a denial, so my assumption that
the report was correct was natural. If, however, a denial
was published, it would be helpful if Mr. Butlin would
state when and where it appeared. I suggest this in no
hectoring spirit, but simply, if the record is wrong, to
get it right.

My main point is not invalidated: that some mem-
ers of the British art establishment, both trade and
curatorial, were badly taken in by the forgeries (perhaps
it would be more accurate to say by the forged prove-
nance). I do not agree with Mr. Butlin that I have
accorded the affair more attention than it deserves. Un-
der all circumstances what I wrote was mild enough; it
is a good thing to be reminded that such things are
possible, even among the well informed. Surely, too, it
is proper that reference to the Keating affair should be
made in a scholarly journal, the main subject of which
is so closely related to Samuel Palmer.

Mr. Butlin is kind enough to refer to what he calls
“the reviewer’s cleverness.” I make no claim to have been
clever; little perception was required, if one looked at
the forgeries properly, to see them for what they were.

As for being an “enthusiastic amateur,” I can only
say that I agree. There is nothing wrong with having
enthusiasm for one’s subject; and as an amateur I am in
excellent company.